

WYOMING INTERAGENCY

SAGE-GROUSE UPDATE

SAGEGROUSE_UPDATE@EWYOMING.GOV, NO. 8

JUNE 19, 2012

WORKSHOPS FOR SAGE-GROUSE POLICY UPDATES & DENSITY AND DISTURBANCE CALCULATION TOOL (DDCT) WEB APPLICATION TECHNICAL TRAINING

The Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGIS) and the inter-agency sage-grouse working group are ready to roll out the DDCT web application and are planning a series of one-day workshops around the state for policy updates and technical training. The web application will enable the public to conduct the DDCT process on the internet, creating an avenue for analysis without the need for GIS software, while still allowing integration with existing GIS projects where available. All existing disturbance digitized for individual projects will be stored and reviewed. After the data has been reviewed it will be integrated into a statewide disturbance layer, which is available for other proponents to use, minimizing the duplication of effort on digitizing disturbance in overlapping DDCT areas. Unpermitted, confidential project information will be viewable only by individual proponents and not available to the public, or other proponents. All aspects of the DDCT process can be conducted via the web application.

Sage-grouse policy updates and DDCT web application technical training opportunities will be held from **10:30a-4p** on **6/25**, **6/27**, and **6/28** at the locations specified below. Please RSVP to Gwen Booth at (307) 777-4506 or gwen.booth@wyo.gov. See agenda and information about workshop materials on page 2.

June 25, 2012

Green River

Western WY Community College
Green River Center, Rm. 206
1 College Way
Green River, WY

June 27, 2012

Casper

Casper College
Physical Science Building, Rm. 103
125 College Drive
Casper, WY

June 28, 2012

Sheridan

Sheridan College
Whitney Building, CTEL Room
3059 Coffeen Avenue
Sheridan, WY

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SAGE-GROUSE POLICY UPDATES & DDCT WEB APPLICATION TRAINING AGENDA

10:30am - 12pm: Policy Updates

Data Status of Sage-Grouse: An update on monitoring data for Wyoming and what it indicates

Sage-Grouse RMP/LRMP Amendment Update & National Technical Team (NTT) Report

Implementation of the BLM IM: IM 2012 vs. IM 2010 vs. Executive Order 2011

Habitat Update: Disturbed vs. no longer disturbed

Sage-Grouse Executive Order 2011-5 DDCT Worksheet

1pm - 4pm: DDCT Web Application

Background on the web application and who needs to use it

Presentation of the web application

(various web application topics will be covered and opportunity for user questions will be provided throughout the afternoon)

*Workshop materials will be available for download/print on 6/22 at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/Web2011/wildlife-1000818.aspx>. Limited copies will be available at each workshop, so please come prepared with your own materials.

INTRODUCING....

NICHOLAS GRAF: DDCT DATA & APPLICATION STEWARD

As noted in previous newsletters, the Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGIS) has been working on developing a web-based DDCT application to help facilitate the DDCT process for any agency or entity that needs to complete the disturbance analysis. Managing the application and the data inputs into the application will require oversight for quality assurance and quality control. Nicholas Graf was hired as an Assistant Academic Research Scientist to fill the newly created Data and Application Steward position at WyGIS. Nicholas comes to WyGIS from the Kansas Adjutant General's Department where he was a GIS analyst for nearly four years. Nicholas earned an MA in Geography from Kansas State University in 2008. While at Kansas State, he also earned his graduate level GIScience Certificate. Nicholas earned a BS in Geography with an emphasis in Physical and Analytical Geography from the University of Wyoming in 2006.

Among other things, Nicholas is helping to finish development of the web application, test it, and help us roll it out to the public in late June. He will be building and maintaining a statewide surface disturbance layer based on individual DDCTs that are conducted via web application, and will provide technical feedback to proponents on individual projects. Welcome back Nicholas!



FAQS

WHY IS THE GREATER SAGE-GROUSE, A CANDIDATE SPECIES FOR LISTING UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT, STILL HUNTED IN WYOMING?

Most simply, populations of sage-grouse in Wyoming are substantial enough not to be negatively impacted by conservatively regulated harvest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service findings have indicated that habitat loss and fragmentation are primary threats to sage-grouse. After substantial public input, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission recently voted to keep Wyoming's three day sage-grouse hunting season in Northeast Wyoming open this fall. A report on the subject of sage-grouse hunting can be found at: http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/Departments/Wildlife/pdfs/SG_HUNTINGSAGEGROUSE0000670.pdf

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SURFACE DISTURBANCE OR DENSITY OF OIL, GAS, AND MINING DISTURBANCES IN SAGE-GROUSE CORE AREA EXCEEDS EXECUTIVE ORDER 2011-5 GUIDELINES?

This topic has been discussed in previous newsletters (#3 and #6) as it pertains to areas that exceed the 5% disturbance and 1/640 density of disturbance guidelines outlined in Executive Order 2011-5 prior to factoring in the proposed disturbance. In other words, it is not the disturbance caused by the proposed project that results in a density or disturbance calculation exceeding Wyoming's core area strategy thresholds. But, as development continues in core area and the gap between meeting executive order guidelines and exceeding them becomes smaller and smaller, inevitably, new proposed projects will cause either or both the density and disturbance calculations to exceed recommended thresholds. So, what happens next?

Sage-grouse are not keeping track of what's old disturbance and what's new. What is important to the birds is that their historic habitat, places where they traditionally lek, nest, raise chicks, and winter are minimally fragmented and minimally disrupted by human activity. The goal is the same regardless of what caused the density and disturbance thresholds to be exceeded, or when it

was exceeded: No net gain in disturbance in core area. The proponent should work with permitting agencies and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to minimize the project footprint as much as possible; co-locate the project within existing disturbance or in mapped, unsuitable sage-grouse habitat; mitigate habitat loss by proactively reclaiming habitat in advance of project development and after project development; and develop the project in a way that will not cause declines in sage-grouse populations.



Sage thrasher photo courtesy of fieldguide.mt.gov

HAVE A QUESTION?
sagegrouse_update@ewyoming.gov

SAGE-GROUSE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM (SGIT) UPDATE

SGIT members met in March to discuss a variety of topics related to Executive Order 2011-5 and the core area strategy, as well as to listen to and provide feedback on various Density and Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT) process cases. Decisions made by the SGIT involve issues of transmission and visibility, pipeline corridors, reclaimed and suitable habitat, fences, and habitat improvement. In a nutshell:

- ◆ Transmission lines planned **inside** of established Executive Order 2011-5 corridors (i.e., 1/2 mile on either side of existing 115kV or larger lines and east-west corridors in Attachment D, Map 1 and 2) do not require the DDCT process. Transmission lines **outside** of established corridors do require the DDCT process and will continue to count towards the 5% disturbance calculation. The disturbance footprint is calculated as right-of-way length x width and should include all access roads, staging areas, and other surface disturbance associated with line construction. However, established corridors, as described above, are considered unsuitable habitat when they fall within the DDCT area of another proposed project. As a result, the corridor length x width can be excluded from both the total disturbance acres and total DDCT acres.
- ◆ Wyoming BLM Resource Management Plans (RMPs) have established utility corridors that cross public, state, and private lands in Wyoming. Proponents of new pipelines that are constructed within these corridors need not conduct the DDCT process. Additionally, these established corridors are considered unsuitable habitat when they fall within the DDCT area of another proposed project, and so the right-of-way length x width is excluded from both the total disturbance acres and total DDCT acres. New pipeline corridors located outside of RMP-established corridors will continue to count towards the disturbance calculation until successfully reclaimed. Information has been added to the DDCT Process Manual, page 5.
- ◆ A protocol has been developed for determining when reclamation has reached suitable habitat, and no longer must be counted as disturbance in the DDCT process. The protocol involves a methodology for measuring for number and frequency of desirable native grasses, forbs, and sagebrush. Note that meeting “suitable” standards may not be the same as meeting bond release standards. Information has been added to the DDCT Process Manual, page 6.
- ◆ Fence distance and density in relation to leks was discussed in light of research conducted in Idaho. A subgroup was assigned to investigate the issue further and bring a recommendation back to the SGIT at their next meeting.
- ◆ Language regarding habitat improvements in Executive Order 2011-5 Attachment C, #4 was clarified. The intent of exempting habitat improvements <10 surface acres applies to aquatic habitat improvements as opposed to terrestrial (e.g., upland) habitat improvements.

Wyoming’s core area strategy is not a one-size-fits-all approach to the conservation of the state’s sage-grouse habitat and populations, and both new and old issues will continue to require discussion for resolution. The policy regarding these issues will also continue to evolve based on new information and science (Executive Order 2011-5 pg. 4, #19). SGIT meetings are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled for July.



“Standoff” Photo courtesy of Tom Christiansen

KEEPING YOU IN THE LOOP

- ◆ The DDCT Process Manual has been updated (4/16/12) and posted on the ftp_piaa site and WGFD website:
<http://gf.state.wy.us/web2011/wildlife-1000382.aspx>
- ◆ WGFD sage-grouse lek files have been updated with 2011 data. Please log-on to the ftp_piaa site and download the new lek perimeter file (GISfiles—>sage-grouse—>ddct_occlekperi102011) for use with the DDCT.
- ◆ The U.S. Forest Service Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland is now a cooperating agency with Wyoming BLM in the sage-grouse RMP amendment process. Wyoming sage-grouse RMP amendments for six BLM field offices and Forest Service units are scheduled to be completed in 2013. For more information on the amendment and timeline, visit: <https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning?planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPageId=18703>
- ◆ Information on Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) is available from the USFWS Wyoming Ecological Services field office online at:
http://www.fws.gov/wyominges/Pages/LandownerTools/CCAA/CCAA_Home.html

WHAT ARE WE WORKING ON NOW?

Our working group (BLM, WGFD, USFS, NRCS, and other Wyoming State Agencies) continues to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues that come up regarding the implementation of the core area strategy. We are continuing to hammer out workable solutions to issues brought to our attention from folks in the field, and work to provide clarity on policy and process questions as they arise.

HABITAT ASSESSMENT

The interagency group has been working to clarify the standards and protocol for a habitat assessment, which is recommended in Executive Order 2011-5 as part of the permitting process when a DDCT indicates that density and/or disturbance calculations exceed thresholds. Generally speaking, a habitat assessment can be conducted at many scales, ranging from fine to coarse, which is not specified in the executive order. The group is vetting through practical ways to delineate unsuitable habitat within a DDCT boundary, which may or may not bring the density and disturbance calculations within the guidelines, but will identify areas where project siting may minimize impacts to sage-grouse and where reclamation or restoration efforts may increase suitable sage-grouse habitat.



FTP_PIAA SITE INSTRUCTIONS

USING INTERNET EXPLORER:

1. Open Internet Explorer and enter <ftp://gf.state.wy.us/> in the browser.
2. Enter username: ftp_piaa and password: piaa123.
3. Go to right side of toolbar and click Page (next to print button).
4. Scroll down and click 'Open FTP Site in Windows Explorer'.
5. Re-enter username and password.

USING WINDOWS EXPLORER:

1. Left click Windows Start button on bottom left corner of screen.
2. Go to Computer and enter <ftp://gf.state.wy.us/> in the browser.
3. Enter username: ftp_piaa and password: piaa123.

TIP: Download documents to your desktop before opening or printing.

REMINDER: Download the latest data from the ftp site each time you do a DDCT.

TROUBLE SHOOTING:

1. Open Internet Explorer browser and go to Tools on the right side of toolbar.
2. Scroll down to Internet Options.
3. Go to the Advanced tab and check the following boxes under Browsing:
 - a. Enable FTP Folder View
 - b. Use Passive FTP
4. Try accessing the ftp site again.

**** Please note that the ftp site will become obsolete when the DDCT web application is up and running in July 2012.**